## **AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

- 1. (Canceled)
- 2. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 23, which satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \le L/D \le 50 \tag{2}$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness (µm) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length  $(\mu m)$  of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

- 3. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 23, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.
  - 4. (Canceled)
- 5. (Withdrawn) A method for producing a dry-process nonwoven fabric, which comprises:

applying a water jet of 30 kg/cm<sup>2</sup> or more to a web that contains the fibers of claim 23, or

needle-punching the web to a punching density of at least 250 kg/cm<sup>2</sup> to thereby fibrillate the fibers.

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6. (Withdrawn) The method as claimed in claim 5, wherein said fibers satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \le L/D \le 50 \tag{2}$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness (µm) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (µm) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

- 7. (Withdrawn) The method as claimed in claim 5, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.
  - 8. (Canceled)
- 9. (Previously Presented) A dry-process nonwoven fabric obtained according to the method of claim 5.
- 10. (Previously Presented) The nonwoven fabric as claimed in claim 9, wherein said fibers satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \le L/D \le 50 \tag{2}$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness ( $\mu m$ ) of the fibers which is a mean length ( $\mu m$ ) of the minor side of the cross section of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (µm) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

- 11. (Previously Presented) The nonwoven fabric as claimed in claim 9, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.
  - 12. (Canceled)
- 13. (Withdrawn) A method for producing a wet-process water-jet nonwoven fabric, which comprises:

applying a water jet of 30 kg/cm<sup>2</sup> or more to base paper prepared from a slurry that contains the fibers of claim 23 as a part of the fibrous component thereof, to thereby fibrillate the fibers.

14. (Withdrawn) The method as claimed in claim 13, wherein said fibers satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \le L/D \le 50 \tag{2}$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness (µm) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (µm) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

- 15. (Withdrawn) The method as claimed in claim 13, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.
  - 16. (Canceled)

- 17. (Previously Presented) A wet-process nonwoven fabric obtained according to the method of claim 13.
- 18. (Previously Presented) The nonwoven fabric as claimed in claim 17, wherein said fibers satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \le L/D \le 50 \tag{2}$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness ( $\mu m$ ) of the fibers which is a mean length ( $\mu m$ ) of the minor side of the cross section of the fibers; and

L indicates the length ( $\mu m$ ) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

- 19. (Previously Presented) The nonwoven fabric as claimed in claim 17, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.
  - 20. (Canceled)
  - 21. (Canceled)
  - 22. (Canceled)
- 23. (Currently Amended) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers having an extremely flattened cross-sectional profile and having a mean thickness D ( $\mu$ m) that satisfies the following formula (1):

$$0.4 \le D \le 5 \tag{1},$$

wherein

D = S/L;

D indicates the mean thickness ( $\mu m$ ) of the fibers which is a mean length ( $\mu m$ ) of the minor side of the cross section of the fibers;

S indicates the cross-section area ( $\mu m^2$ ) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (µm) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers; wherein said polyvinyl alcohol fibers consist of polyvinyl alcohol and from 0.01 to 30

% by mass of a layered compound having a mean particle size of from 0.01 to 30 μm.

24. (Currently Amended) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers having an extremely thinly flattened cross-sectional profile and having a mean thickness D ( $\mu$ m) that satisfies the following formula (1):

$$0.4 \le D \le 5 \tag{1},$$

wherein

D = S/L;

D indicates the mean thickness ( $\mu m$ ) of the fibers which is a mean length ( $\mu m$ ) of the minor side of the cross section of the fibers;

S indicates the cross-section area  $(\mu m^2)$  of the fibers; and

L indicates the length ( $\mu m$ ) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers;

wherein said polyvinyl alcohol fibers consist of polyvinyl alcohol and from 0.01 to 30% by mass of a layered compound having a mean particle size of from 0.01 to  $30 \mu m$ .

25-26. (Canceled)

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27. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, which satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \le L/D \le 50 \tag{2}$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness (µm) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length ( $\mu$ m) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

- 28. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.
  - 29. (Canceled)
- 30. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.
  - 31. (Canceled)
- 32. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 23, wherein said fibers have a water-absorbing speed of 123-128 mm/5min.

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- 33. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 23, wherein when said fibers are used to wipe off a transparent acrylic plate spotted with Indian ink, a residue after wiping is 3.1 to 5.0%.
- 34. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, wherein said fibers have a water-absorbing speed of 123-128 mm/5min.
- 35. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, wherein when said fibers are used to wipe off a transparent acrylic plate spotted with Indian ink, a residue after wiping is 3.1 to 5.0%.
- 36. (New) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 23, wherein said layered compound is smectite, montmorillonite or mica.
- 37. (New) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, wherein said layered compound is smectite, montmorillonite or mica.